

Title: Joan Eardley | Painting Catterline and the sea

Summary: In this episode, we explore how Joan Eardley approached the sea as a subject and the importance of the village of Catterline in the artist's life.

Duration: 43:42

Contributors: Lachlan Goudie (painter and broadcaster), Jan Patience (arts journalist), Ron Stephen (photographer and former Catterline resident) and Dawnne McGeachy (painter).

Transcript

00:00:08

Lachlan Goudie

Joan Eardley is one of Scotland's most popular and influential twentieth century artists. Her powerful and expressive paintings transformed her everyday surroundings, from Glasgow's streets to the rugged Kincardineshire coastline.

I'm painter and broadcaster Lachlan Goudie and in this three-part series to mark the artist's centenary year, I'll be joined by figures from the art world and beyond to try to better understand the character of this ground-breaking artist whose incredible body of work has endured long beyond her lifetime and continues to inspire new generations of artists.

In this episode, I explore how Joan Eardley approached the sea as a subject and the importance of the village of Catterline in the artist's life with journalist Jan Patience, artist Dawnne McGeachy and former Catterline resident Ron Stephen.

Jan, could you tell us why it is important to mark the artist's centenary and also about the role of the Scottish Women and the Arts Research Network or SWARN as it is known?

Jan Patience

Hi Lachlan, I'm Jan Patience and I write about art, usually Scottish art, for *The Herald* and other outlets. So, yes, the Eardley centenary is an incredible marker for Scottish art because she is so important in the canon of British art as well as Scottish art. She is a painter that is very well known, some would say not as well-known as she should be, but she has gone into legend in many ways because of her early death at the age of 42 in 1963. She had a short career but it is very well worth marking.

The Scottish Women and the Arts Research Network, otherwise known as SWARN, was set up by Glasgow University, including the Hunterian Special Collection and Archives. They wanted to mark Eardley's centenary in some way, the people who were working there, and so they got together with other organisations such as the Glasgow School of Art, Paisley Museum, Glasgow Women's Library, Glasgow Museums and the National Galleries of

Scotland. It set up initially with the aim of uncovering and sharing stories about women artists and makers but with the Eardley celebration as the starting point, so it is going to be a long-term group. This is its first year but it is going to be looking at other women artists in the future.

00:02:53

Lachlan Goudie

Wonderful. And it is wonderful to be celebrating the centenary of Joan Eardley's birth this year, she is an artist I admire hugely but who has also been very inspirational to my own work. The early part of Joan's career was based upon the work she created in Glasgow, so could you maybe tell us how the village of Catterline played a major part in her life, and can you explain how Joan came to be there?

Jan Patience

Joan didn't visit Catterline until – she was 29 at the time – May 1951. She was in Aberdeen, setting up an exhibition at the Gaumont Cinema at the behest of an artist called Annette Soper. Annette Soper was an art teacher, she taught in Aberdeen, she was ten years older than Joan at that time, so in her late thirties. She had seen, and read a review, of Joan's exhibition at the Glasgow School of Art. It was actually in the *Herald* newspaper, the newspaper I now work for, and the exhibition was held in 1949 and it contained drawings and paintings of Joan's time on her travelling scholarship in Italy. And it was very, very well reviewed for the quality of her draughtsmanship. It attracted a lot of attention. So Annette saw this review, she had just been asked to coordinate exhibitions in the Gaumont Cinema, in a tearoom actually, in the cinema, and it was Aberdeen's first independent art gallery, as it turns out. So she invited Joan to show her work in Aberdeen. Joan came up and stayed with Annette and her family in Stonehaven and it was through Annette that she visited Catterline. She actually contracted mumps during the run of this exhibition. She went home to Bearsden to convalesce for a bit and then she came back up to Stonehaven, because she had obviously made friends with the Soper family by this stage and she liked it there so she went back up and Catterline was a favourite haunt of the Soper family. It's not far from Stonehaven so they went there for picnics and so on. So, in May 1951, she visited with Annette and fell under its spell right away.

00:05:27

Lachlan Goudie

But here is this artist who has spent so much of her career painting in the grimy streets of east end Glasgow. Why do you think that she felt such a strong connection immediately to Catterline, this village perched on a clifftop, confronted by the North Sea?

Jan Patience

It's an interesting question. In Italy, she did visit and was very inspired by, a couple of different places. Venice, being one and another being a fishing village called (I'll probably say this wrong, Lachlan) Forte dei Marmi, which had lots of fishing nets, and she portrayed

them in her drawings and these drawings were in that exhibition at the Glasgow School of Art. So she was drawn to the subject matter, shall we say. She was drawn to the margins, to the sights that people overlooked generally, that weren't regarded by painters as worthy subject matter. I think Catterline just caught her. It's a clifftop village, it's a small village, very atmospheric, it has the sea booming in, the big skies, there's just such a lot about it. I think she just liked it, away from the city. She was born and brought up in the country, she spent her formative years there and I think she just liked the peace and quiet but also the noise at the same time.

Lachlan Goudie

But nonetheless, when she arrives in Catterline in the early 1950s, is it not true that she struggled to actually paint the sea? It wasn't a subject that perhaps, coming from Glasgow and that urban environment, she instinctively felt capable of painting?

Jan Patience

Yes, she didn't draw the sea until a good few years into knowing and living in Catterline, on and off. She painted the cliffs, the fields, the houses, she would go down on to the shore I think, she would always paint up the way, rather than out the way, I think she maybe found it too difficult. There was something stopping her. I do know she went to see a very important exhibition which a lot of artists saw in Scotland of Nicolas de Staël and I think maybe that unleashed something in her, and she started painting the sea not long after that, in the mid-1950s. The subject matter was more – she didn't paint people actually, it's as if she didn't want to paint the people in Catterline.

Lachlan Goudie

That I find fascinating, because of course in Glasgow it's the portraits of the children who are running around the streets near her studio, it's the character of Glasgow that she communicates through portraits. But when she comes to Catterline, and notwithstanding this reticence to paint the sea at the start, there are no people. It's this portrait of a landscape and for me it's so intriguing to find her over these years from 1951 through to 1963, she turns her gaze from all those cottages on the clifftop towards this great thundering sea that confronts her and she immerses herself in that subject. It is almost for me as if in those two distinct places, Glasgow and Catterline, she is expressing two different parts of her character and two different areas of fascination in her work.

Jan Patience

Yes I think so and I think that the part of her character that was maybe prone to depression and to mood swings and to kind of trying to articulate that feeling and paint, that's maybe what she came round to in Catterline because in Glasgow she was painting these children, the streets and the grime, there was something about the energy of Glasgow and the people that she loved. But at the same time when she went to Catterline it was about capturing mood and capturing a sort of feeling that she couldn't maybe capture in her Glasgow paintings.

00:09:48

Lachlan Goudie

You mention that Joan was a complex person, and she did go through periods of ill health and mental struggles, and when I look at these great expressive, expansive paintings of the rollers and the sea, I do get a sense of someone emotionally releasing themselves as they are confronted by that subject.

Jan Patience

Yes, me too. I, probably like you Lachlan, have stood in front of these big paintings of the sea in particular, and it's almost like they rock you back on your heels. There is such a power in them. An incredible use of paint and energy and things thrown into them, you can actually literally see the sea on some of them, the salt from the sea. And she got bigger as well, as she got into painting the sea her canvasses got bigger and bigger as well, so it was as if something was unleashed in her that she wanted to paint bigger. If there was loads happening weather-wise then she wanted to stay there on the spot just keeping going. If there was a storm she would anchor herself down, anchor her canvas down, anchor herself down, her big heavy boots and her boiler suit.

Lachlan Goudie

And why do you think the public find these paintings particularly of the sea so compelling? They are, many of them, actually quite challenging because as Joan begins to paint that expanse of water, her images become more abstract, less and less recognisable and yet people themselves feel a real emotional connection to those works.

Jan Patience

It is that sort of magic, isn't it. An alchemy where if we knew how she did it, then everyone would be doing it because it's just something in the paintings particularly of the sea and of the fields even round about that... she said she wasn't a fan of good weather but she did paint some amazing summer fields and just an explosion of colour, and the seeds and the grasses were in there and I think she stirred herself into the paintings and people pick up that feeling. This woman has been dead nearly 60 years but you can still feel it.

Lachlan Goudie

I think that is absolutely right. I think for me there is such honesty in her work. There is an economy of mark making, there is an instinctiveness – you really don't get a sense that Joan is hiding anything when she confronts the canvas. It is hell for leather, every time she stands in front of it, she is going to give of herself completely, and none more so than in her paintings of those rollers and the sea. I feel completely immersed and embraced by those paintings, and the flecks of colour, the splodges of pastel paint, the sort of recklessness – almost not caring whether you know what's there, viewer, I'm going to make you feel it. And that to achieve as an artist is phenomenally hard but requires honesty and bravery and that is what I find so incredibly compelling about Joan's work is you meet the person in the

paintings and there is almost nothing in between you and her, and that's why after all these decades I think she remains popular, and increasingly so, I have to say.

Jan Patience

I think so. I run the Joan Eardley social media on behalf of her family and that feeling comes through every day on social media, on Instagram and Twitter that people are just in love with her, there is no other expression for it I think.

00:13:49

Lachlan Goudie

Well look Jan, thank you very much for the moment but now I am going to turn to Ron Stephen. Now Ron, as a former resident of Catterline, could you maybe describe what the village was like in the period when Joan was familiar with it, around about 1950-1963?

Ron Stephen

Hi Lachlan, I'm Ron Stephen, I was born in Catterline in 1945. I remember Joan coming to the village at the very start. I came across some words by Annette Stephen I had noted down from quite some time ago and maybe if I was to relate to what Annette said. Annette said: 'Catterline is a fundamental place which is just right when you see it. The people, the little houses, the curve of the bay, the rocks, the sea and the land all take on a different look with the seasons as they change through the year. You could say that being in the place is almost like being within a Turner painting, no matter which way you look. There is tremendous light all around and you cannot fail to be conscious of the scale of the sea and the sky. You can almost smell the place.'

Now, if I was maybe able to expand my feeling on that or maybe to give you a better understanding of the atmosphere, I think this would all have come together with the state of the tide, whether it be high or low, or just slack water, the new tarred ropes, crail bait, seaweed, fish drying in the sun and the racks on the shore, the smell of the salmon nets drying, the wildflowers and grasses on the braes, all mixed together, this would be especially noticeable in the summertime.

Lachlan Goudie

Hugely evocative, Ron. It's almost as you're speaking, you're conveying a visual poem and that's again something that I think Joan's paintings communicate. In their elements of abstraction, they are giving you that sense not just of what something looks like, but of the perfume as you say of the flowers in the fields behind Catterline, of the seaweed maybe on the beach and salt in the air and I think that you've managed there to distil your experience of living and growing up in Catterline what Joan has dropped into those paintings and for me it is very exciting to think that Joan as an outsider came to this place and with her sensibilities and sensitivities was alerted to all of those features so quickly. Do you feel when you look at Joan's paintings that she is summing up all those atmospherics that you have described there in her work?

Ron Stephen

Well I don't think that she would have missed any of that out, to be honest. The thing about Catterline is that, you know, if you take the geography of the place, the thing that you can maybe get your head around is that the pier at Catterline runs true north to south. So when I look at Joan's stuff, I always relate to the pier running north and south, and I always relate to where she has her suns, where she has her light, where she has her moons, and all these different things. And I can work out the compass of that and I know more or less where she's been at what time of year et cetera. When you see the boats up off the shore you know it's more a later autumn/winter thing or when the boats are in the water it's a spring/summer thing. So I am fortunate I can relate to all these things and it gives me a little bit of a privileged insight.

But also when she came first she did a lot of sketching. She was sketching a lot. I remember we used to stand at the north end of the pier, she used to sit on a fish box at the north end of the pier, and she would maybe be doing four or five boats that were hauled halfway up the beach and I vividly remember we used to stand behind her on the wall and look down at what she was doing. Plain piece of paper, charcoal and sketching away. She did sketch a lot. Obviously she painted as well, but she did do a lot of sketching and I think she was drawing a map out of the place slowly, where she wanted to go. Whether she had a mid-term vision or a long-term vision that might have been what she was about.

00:18:51

Lachlan Goudie

Ron, you describe beautifully this idea of children gathered around Joan who always, throughout her life, it seems, was a magnet to children to come and watch what she was painting. But what did you then as a child watching this artist at work and perhaps what did your parents, family or friends think about this artist who had arrived in the village and the kinds of images that she was creating?

Ron Stephen

The residents of Catterline, when Joan came first, it was, I suppose you could maybe term it as a little bit of a culture shock because she was so distinctive. She was so different and Catterline was a place where you had a strong work ethic of people working at the sea, some people working on the land, but especially the sea, so the village was really driven by the time and the tide of the sea. That was the working routine, that was what drove the whole thing. The fishermen would go out in the morning, quite often at 4 o'clock in the morning, so they had a strong work ethic. Now the likes of my Granny for instance who would have been a lady in her late seventies at that time, she would have had absolutely no understanding of what Joan was about. She would be a total mystery to her and most of the people were the same. She started doing the buildings and she was about the people and she engaged with the people and I think that was the way it came about. You did see her standing speaking to people but as kids as you were saying earlier, she never painted any of the kids in Catterline at all, never ever. At that time, we never knew she was doing the

artwork she was doing in Glasgow. We never knew she was doing kids in Glasgow. Because if we had known that, we might have put some sort of our juvenile pressure on her to do such things with us.

We thought she was just doing landscapes. Once she got stuck in among the salmon nets, even as kids we could see that was a real draw for her. Getting into these salmon nets because she was there a lot. Of course, we just tried to cadge sweeties from her.

Lachlan Goudie

What was her reaction to being watched because as an artist myself I know it can sometimes be inhibiting to have a crowd of little kids scrabbling around you. Was she tolerant or did she tell you to shoo off?

Ron Stephen

Well I can totally understand that because in later life I became a photographer and I don't like it either so I know exactly where you're coming from. You just say 'move on', and she was very much of that ilk where we would stand and look at what she was doing and then she would engage in conversation with us and she was always very polite but we were very aware that she had her time limit with us. You could see she wanted to get on with what she was doing and we never crossed that line, I don't think. Apart from some of the older youths in the village at the time who maybe had a different take on it and I do know that one particular artwork she was working on there were two of them that went and added to her artistic input on her easel while she was not watching. I'm not going to say who that was!

Lachlan Goudie

Any repercussions, did she notice?

Ron Stephen

She certainly noticed, but I think she just tolerated it. But that was just sheer childish devilment, you know.

00:22:46

Lachlan Goudie

Ron, could you perhaps just give us an idea about what the conditions were like that Joan would have been working and living in when she was in Catterline. Was it a pretty harsh environment, really?

Ron Stephen

Yes, absolutely. It was a wee while after Joan came that electricity came to most of the village, but to begin with she had come from an urban setup, into a very rural location. And she would really have to plan her day out. In the village at that time you really had to plan your day out. You needed the fundamentals of food, water, shelter and heat. That was it so she would have to plan her day from the morning and say, 'right, I need to make sure I have water to do me all day, so she would have to go to the well and pump the water, carry it up

the brae, she would have no electricity, so the only method of heating food that she would have would be on an open fire. And all that takes time and time. There's nothing quick about any of that so she would have to plan her day out. She obviously had her art to fit in in between but the village was very basic and Joan had even less. First she came to the Watch House but when she went over to Number One at the South Side, it would be the same thing, no electricity, no water and I mean the rooves in these places leaked and everything. They were far from wind and watertight. There was a little bit of hardiness about her as well. She obviously was able to survive and you got the impression that she didn't need much to survive on. She could get by. Her and Angus Neil, we used to go in the Tattie Holidays in the school to do the tattie lifting, well Joan and Angus Neil went to the tattie lifting.

Lachlan Goudie

Angus Neil who you described there was one of her long term friends throughout her life and who came to live with her, or nearby anyway, in Catterline. And so they would go off and they would pick potatoes?

Ron Stephen

Oh yes.

00:25:10

Lachlan Goudie

So you are describing someone who really embedded themselves in the community. Is there anything more about her character that you could tell us Ron? I mean was she, maybe I get the impression, quite a quietly spoken person, quite reserved, what do you remember of her character?

Ron Stephen

She was quietly spoken, she was very deliberate when she spoke to you but as a child you got the feeling that there was a couthiness about her as well. She had rather a slow, pedantic locomotion about her, she didn't move fast. She was just a pure individual and that was just her time and apart from the fact that she had this tragic ill health, I think she was very, very happy with where she was and what she was doing.

00:26:02

Lachlan Goudie

That is fascinating to hear Ron, thank you. Now, the mythology is that she painted most of her seascapes in the winter and the photographs that survive and the paintings themselves conjure up an image of an artist stood in the wild of the winds, fighting the elements as she painted these canvasses. Dawnne, I am going to turn to you. As a sea painter yourself, could you talk to us about the sea as a subject? What is it that you find so inspirational about the sea?

Dawnne McGeachy

I think for me I suppose historically it has provided creatives from all disciplines – arts and science – a rich resource for inspiration and I am part of that history I guess. I think it expands your thinking. When it is calm it's really soothing and when it's tumultuous, it is unnerving but it still remains very beautiful and I think it is that dichotomy that in part captures the imagination for artists and scientists alike and I think quite often the seascape is quite rich with symbolism. It can be a moment of personal change, whether that is something that is quite turbulent in your life or calm, that can be communicated beautifully through the seascape. But I think the profundity of the seascape does reflect your life and the human condition. It is kind of like a metaphor for a powerful vehicle for paint and for me I think it probably translates because my father was a fisherman, all my family were fisher people and I was a bit obsessed with the sea because of that and trying to understand the scale and the enormity of it and probably how unsafe it was, that was one of the things that was prevalent in my mind when I embarked on this journey to try and paint the sea.

Lachlan Goudie

That's fascinating because I think that that emotional connection is something that really resonates regarding Joan Eardley. The sea then has been part of your life since you were a child. Do you think that that sense of association, that familiarity with the subject is important in the way that it allows you to paint it?

Dawnne McGeachy

Absolutely. I think for me certainly as a child growing up, my father, all my cousins and uncles on both sides of my family, my mum's side, they lived in Shetland and my dad's in Campbeltown were all at sea and I think that was very much embedded in my early work and the way that I tried to understand it. I think there was a complex thing for me where I was really mesmerised by the beauty and fascinated by it and I enjoyed spending days at the shore as most children do but I was very fearful of it. It would waken me in the night with nightmares because I'd be fearful of my family succumbing to its mercies and I think that had an impact on my understanding of it and the way then that I communicated it.

00:29:29

Lachlan Goudie

So you are fitting into a tradition like Joan Eardley and her great predecessor William McTaggart who painted the sea repeatedly along the Argyllshire coast and in his family his own son was a fisherman and died at sea. That connection is so vital in the Scottish tradition and that is really wonderful. What did you initially perhaps as an artist find difficult to paint when you confronted the sea as a subject?

Dawnne McGeachy

This may sound a bit strange and I am no mathematician, quite the opposite actually, but for me it was about trying to understand the mechanics of the sea and I would do that by looking at maths equations. When my dad was at sea - my dad was a very clever man - I

would ask him 'how does the sea work', 'how do waves work', 'how do they get bigger', 'how does this happen'? Because I thought if I could understand what the dangers are and what makes those waves so big and dangerous to my family at sea I don't know if I thought it would give me some peace of mind. As a child I don't think there is any rationale but my father would try to explain the maths in the waves which I never understood but I then got a real appetite for the diagrammatic elements of the waves and what collected the force behind them to make them as big as they could be and that for me was something that I have not a fondness for but a fascination of. I think that impacted my work quite massively when I started to paint just bodies of water with no horizon and no shoreline, just the bodies of water themselves. What made them as animated as they were.

Lachlan Goudie

When you are looking at Joan Eardley's work, particularly her paintings of the sea off Catterline, are there any lessons that you take from those paintings?

Dawnne McGeachy

Absolutely. When I first went to Glasgow School of Art many years ago, Joan was a painter who was very revered. There was a real sense of somebody who really understood the medium of paint in a way that we as young artists were teetering on the edges of. To me she was somebody who, when you looked at her work, as somebody who was brought up in a very small fishing town, similar to Catterline, when you look at her work you could feel the wind and the rain and the salt air and smell all that and you could feel the biting cold and all of those things are articulated beautifully but in a very experiential way in her paintings, in a way that it doesn't translate the landscape at all. It's an experiential view of the landscape and it was very much that she was immersed in all that and that captivated me as a young artist and still does. It is not something that I can do but it is something that I am immensely captivated by. I am immensely captivated by her ability to move paint around and to express that experience of being beside the sea on really stormy days or calm days or whatever it might be.

00:33:14

Lachlan Goudie

Joan exposed herself to the elements and I suspect those elemental conditions affected how she could work. Do you have any experience of working out in the cold, of sketching or drawing immediately confronted by the gales or elements or is this something that you prefer to do in the studio based on research images that you have accumulated?

Dawnne McGeachy

I think it was something that I did very early on but it felt not complete enough for me and not the right thing for me to do as an artist. It's really difficult to explain but I think because I had watched my dad go off on the boat you know, 'bye Dad', and letting him go to sea while I was still safely ashore I didn't feel as if I understood the sea as much as my dad did so I just always felt like a spectator. I felt like someone who was watching something from the side-

lines and I sketch sometimes at the beach and I do write a lot of things. I record the Beaufort wind scale – I always do that – I guess it's a habit of my dad's as well. Before my dad would go to sea on a Sunday night he would listen to the forecast. Similarly, before I go to the sea, I will record the wind scale so I have a record of the Beaufort wind scale for my painting and that becomes part of my painting's narrative. I always felt like unless I was actually in the sea or on a fishing boat it wouldn't be authentic for me to do that immersive thing. Quite frankly I was never brave enough!

Lachlan Goudie

But do you take those feelings into the studio? So, when I paint the sea I can, I suspect a bit like Joan Eardley, get into a state of excitement as I try to capture the wind and the spray. And I have painted the sea whilst in my studio too, and part of my process is to transport myself back to the beach or the pier head and feel that breeze, feel that wind. Is that part of your studio mindset at all or again is your approach so very different?

Dawnne McGeachy

You know how Richter did that thing where he disassembled things? I think I do that as well. I disassemble sea images when I get to the studio. So rather than having a full seascape I will disassemble it and put it into grids and then I'll pull the images apart and then I'll reassemble them in a different way and I think for me it is about control. It is just about trying to control the sea, to try and understand it. I don't want to give myself to the mercy of the sea, it is quite the opposite for me. I really need to control this thing so I think 'I'm going to take this image and then I'm going to take you apart, I'm going to disassemble you and reassemble you in a different way.' So I think it's more about that power thing, never wanting to let yourself be at the mercy of the power of the sea. Interestingly as a much younger artist I painted fishing boats but I would never paint them at sea, I would always paint them in dry dock. And I never understood it. I could never understand, why am I obsessed with painting fishing boats in dry dock? It's because I never wanted my dad to go to sea. I never wanted my family to be at sea, I wanted them to be safe and the sea didn't equate safety for me. But that is not to say that I don't rever in paintings like Joan's where there is this explicit joy of those moments because I am like everyone else, someone who can go to the shore side and absolutely be amazed by the power of the sea and enjoy it and love it, you know.

00:37:24

Lachlan Goudie

Dawnne, you have revealed how the sea as such a compelling subject can be approached by someone like Joan whose creative process is this emotional outlet, this 'explosion', as you describe it, whereas you as a different kind of artist are taking all of the emotion that you have accumulated throughout your lifetime and your family's relationship with the sea and you're exerting in the studio an element of control to see what you can distil from the subject and it just reveals what a wonderful thing art is that we can all respond to this great subject so many different ways. Thank you very much Dawnne, thank you.

In closing I wanted to ask everyone else what kinds of feelings and emotions these images provoke. What is it Ron about those paintings now as you look back on them that you feel translates your memory of Catterline? What is it in those paintings specifically that takes you back in time?

Ron Stephen

Well it absolutely hits the spot Lachlan, it hits the spot with me. It takes me right back and the thing about her paintings is, they're all very accurate in what was there and what wasn't. There's nothing she's left out, everything is in place. Some artists I suppose could say 'I'll just leave that out', or 'that's not relevant,' but I think she painted everything as she saw it and never took anything away. Looking at it now it's really just quite awesome, the whole thing. And I feel very lucky that I had my foot on the ground there and I can maybe just get that wee bit extra out of it. I mean I'm not an artist but I feel I can get that wee bit extra out of it, and the thing is, you'll know yourself, as you look at an image, you can look at it many times, but sometimes there's always something you've missed, and something you see later on and it gives you another appreciation of it. The houses at the south side of Catterline, for instance, only had electricity halfway up the row. And then you see artwork where the electric wires are only halfway up the row. Then the rest of the houses got electricity later, so there's lots of little things that can date things for me. Make it early fifties, mid-fifties or maybe later fifties. And I've a fair understanding of most of the things that have got geography in them. The ones that have got the fields and the wildflowers, that is just a speculative guess for me but most of them I can put my thumb on and say right that was there, that was that time of the year and I understand it. So all in all, awesome.

00:40:26

Lachlan Goudie

Ron, 'awesome' is exactly the word that describes Joan's portrayals of the sea. Finally, Jan, what do you feel when you look at Joan Eardley's paintings of the sea at Catterline?

Jan Patience

Well, I feel that I can taste the salt and the spray. I can feel the energy coming off the painting. You almost feel as if you are channelling Joan Eardley herself. As you said earlier, they are almost abstract because they have gone into this other dimension, and she was a superb draughtsperson and they were quite abstract in the end but as Ron says you can pick out detail, and she always got just so the right detail if it was there, she'd have it in. So for me no-one can compare with that.

Lachlan Goudie

But also what I find interesting is so many people who look at Joan Eardley's paintings have never been to Catterline. They don't know that place, but there's a universality about what she creates and of course that is the hallmark of great landscape painting and seascape painting. There is something eternal in what those great artists communicate and Joan really does that.

Jan Patience

And you can see it in her other works, you know, her Glasgow paintings and these children and these faces that are forever preserved as these cheeky, energetic little children in all their glory. And she transferred that skill to the sea, to the fields, to earlier in her career, old peasants in Italy, old ladies in Arran, she could just capture an essence, which is a very rare thing.

Lachlan Goudie

The paintings as time machines it seems, well I could talk to you all for hours but we have to bring this conversation about the wonderful Joan Eardley to a close.

Ron Stephen

Lachlan, there's one thing, sorry to interject. The one thing I would like to say and Jan will be aware but the people at Catterline, they've got their little plaque on the gable end of the Creel Inn, in memory of Joan, which is a nice thing to have in the village, that was actually organised by my friend Dave Ramsay who lives in the village. The other significant thing that they've got is the painting that was given to the people of Catterline which is actually in the safe-keeping of the Creel Inn, so there are two tangible things in the village at present to say 'Joan Eardley was here.'

Lachlan Goudie

Thank you so much Ron and thank you very much to everyone for taking part in this discussion. I'm Lachlan Goudie. This is a three-part series brought to you by the National Galleries of Scotland.

END